



ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ
THE CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION



**The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
(CYQAA)**

External Evaluation

Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees (EECs)

Contents:

Foreword.....3

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC)5

- **Conflict of Interest.....5**
- **Responsibilities of EEC Members.....5**
- **Responsibilities of the Chair of the EEC6**

Schedule of the Visit to Cyprus7

- **Preliminary Meeting of the EEC7**
- **Orientation and Briefing.....8**

The Site Visit - Guidelines for Conduct of the Site Visit12

Guidelines on Content and Structure of the Report.....14

Responding to the Report17

Personal Data Processing18

ANNEXES

- **Statutory Declaration19**
- **Typical Visit Schedule.....22**

Foreword:

In modern educational systems, **Quality Assurance** signifies the effort aiming at the continuous enhancement of the work of higher education institutions (HEIs). It requires the implementation of a uniform system, including predetermined standards for accreditation¹ and external quality assurance processes that are reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and are published. Such a system allows HEIs to continuously assess and improve their performance.

As a central part of this system, CYQAA's **external evaluation** has been established as a regular, objective and independent assessment carried out periodically by experienced external auditors. The purpose of this external assessment is to define, on the basis of the predetermined accreditation criteria, whether the diverse actions of HEI and the ensuing results are consistent with its predefined plan. Additionally, it examines whether this plan is appropriate for the accomplishment of the institution's objectives. Finally, it examines whether the plan is effectively implemented ensuring thus, the accomplishment of the institution's goals and the improvement of its quality.

External evaluation conducted by External Evaluation Committees (EECs) and it is based on the institution's **application** and the conduct of an on-site visit to the institution. The application is prepared by the institution on the basis of Article 17 of Laws 136(I)/2015 to 47 (I)/2016, in accordance with the evaluation criteria set by CYQAA. The template for the HEI's application for external evaluation, also contains the template for self-assessment. The application for external evaluation along with the self-assessment and other required supporting documents are submitted to the Agency within the timeframe set and announced, by the CYQAA Council.

The institution is responsible to ensure that the application contains all required information and that the information is true and fair. The application and self-assessment includes information, relevant to the criteria set by the Agency or any other standards

¹ In addition to CYQAA generic standards and criteria, specific standards and criteria are used for Medical Schools and Health related programs (WFME standards), distance learning programs (CYQAA standards) and PhD programs under evaluation (CYQAA standards).

incorporated in the documents or adopted by the Council, in accordance to international practices in the various scientific disciplines.

Quality standards and indicators are incorporated in the template for the drafting of the EEC's report. The template also includes a guide for the conduct of the site visit. The template indicates that external evaluation follows the structure of assessment areas. Each assessment area is preceded by a presentation of the standards and questions which EEC may utilize for the conduct of the site visit and the external evaluation in general. The questions aim at facilitating the understanding of each assessment area and at illustrating the range of topics covered by the standards.

In the External Evaluation Report, each assessment area will consist of the standards and the description of the way in which the standards are met.

The guidelines included in this document are addressed to the members of EEC, who undertake the task of evaluating higher education. It is strongly recommended to read and use them together with the Quality Standards and Indicators included in the template **External Evaluation Report** which has been prepared by the Agency and it is published on the Agency's website.

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

The CYQAA Council, is the competent authority responsible for appointing the members of the EEC which consists of, at least, three (3) academics, with specializations relevant to the discipline of the program, one (1) university student, and if the subject of the program of study concerns a regulated profession, one (1) member of the Professional Body which grants the license to exercise the particular profession. Additionally, if the programs of study under evaluation are offered by the Distance Learning Methodology, a Distance Learning Expert is also appointed in the committee. The Chair of the EEC is nominated by the Agency.

Conflict of Interest:

The Agency coordinates the whole process and ensures the impartiality of all members of the EECs, precluding as best as possible cases of conflict of interests. To this aim, prospective members of EECs are asked to accept and sign the **Statutory Declaration Confirming the Absence of any Conflict of Interest [ANNEX 1]**.

The Chair and members of the EEC and Agency sign an agreement (Contract) in which the terms of remuneration for EEC members are fixed.

Responsibilities of EEC Members:

The members of EEC read and comment on the **application** submitted by the HEI and forwarded to the EEC before their arrival to Cyprus, they participate in the committee's meetings and in the Site Visit, may request additional information, and they discuss their findings; they contribute to the formulation of the **Report** under the guidance of the Chair of the EEC and share collectively the overall responsibility for the External Evaluation Report.

Responsibilities of the EEC Chair

The Chair of the EEC:

- Assigns responsibilities to the committee members according to their specialty or/and expertise; he/she ensures their participation in the drafting of the Report and their *consensus* before submitting it to the Agency.
- organizes and coordinates discussions;
- inspires and cultivates a collaborative spirit
- ensures spare time at the end of each day for private meetings of the Committee;
- supervises the formulation of the ***External Evaluation Report*** on the relevant template;
- serves as a contact with the Agency on behalf of the EEC members;
- forwards the signed Report to the Agency and responds to the HEI's comments on the Report, if necessary, after consulting with the other EEC members.

Schedule of the Visit to Cyprus

Preliminary Meeting of the EEC:

It is recommended that a first meeting of the EEC members precedes the site visit. During this preliminary meeting, EEC members may discuss and comment on the HEIs **application** and the other documents received. During this initial phase, the EEC members discuss their first impressions from studying the application and the evaluation criteria set or adopted by the Agency:

- Is the *application* detailed enough? Does it include all necessary information and data for a valid judgment to be formed? Are there unclear or vague data needing further analysis and clarification?
- Are there any inconsistencies?
- Note if there is information missing, to be requested during the site visit. At a second level, the following matters should be looked into:
 - How effectively are the abovementioned strategic dimensions (approach, implementation, results, improvements) concerning the main evaluation criteria (curriculum, teaching, research and other services) dealt with in the *Application*?
 - Does the relevant department have an action plan for improvements? Is it realistic and functional?
 - Did all constituents of the department's academic community participate in the Internal Evaluation process?
 - Which aspects, procedures or services should be most particularly examined during the site visit?
 - Which are the key-persons that the EEC should meet with during the site visit?
- The first observations and comments of the EEC on the *application* are expected to generate questions that must be looked into or answered during the site visit.

Orientation and Briefing:

Face-to-face orientation and briefing before the site visit to the HEI under evaluation. The topics covered during the briefing are the following:

- Short presentation of the Agency and its competencies within the legal framework.
- Information on the legislative framework (the types of external evaluation, the duration of accreditation, its obligatory nature etc.)
- Presentation of the steps in the external evaluation process leading to the Council's decision.
- Explanation of the numerical scale in each subcategory of the criteria – what each grade corresponds to.
- Presentation of the additional criteria which are applied for programs of study in medicine
- Questions / answers

Specifically, the Agency informs the members of the EEC about the national educational system, the legal framework and the evaluation procedures with special reference to the following:

- The operation of a new program of study is not permitted unless it has received its Programmatic Evaluation-Accreditation by CYQAA.
- The same generic criteria, standards and indicators apply for both current (operating) and new programs.
- In addition to CYQAA generic standards and criteria, specific standards and criteria are used for Medical Schools and Health related programs (WFME standards), distance learning programs (CYQAA standards) and PhD programs under evaluation (CYQAA standards).
- Programs of study are periodically externally evaluated by CYQAA every five (5) years.

- On the basis of the External Evaluation Report, and the recommendations of the EEC, the Council will decide whether a program of study a) is accredited, b) is rejected or c) a second evaluation will be carried out.
- The numerical score in each subcategory of the criteria dimensions, in the External Evaluation Report should be justified and explained qualitatively according to CYQAA standards as well as international standards.
- The numerical score and the reasoning of the numerical score which follows below each dimension of criteria as well as the final recommendations must agree.
- In regard to Medical Programs, particular attention should be paid to
 - Basic Medical Education WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement (The 2015 Revision)
 - Standards for Master's Degrees in Medical and Health Professions Education – WFME Global Standards for Improvement

The above WFME standards are incorporated in the relevant External Evaluation Report Template for Medical Programs.

- In Regard to PhD programs, the EEC is expected to confirm that there are processes in place in regard to the following:
 - Student Admission Criteria and Terms
There must be defined and specific criteria that the potential students need to meet for admission in the program as well as how the selection procedures are made
 - Program requirements
The requirements of the doctoral degree program must be analyzed and published, i.e. the stages of completion, the minimum and maximum time of completing the program, the examinations, the procedures for supporting and accepting the student's proposal, the criteria for obtaining the Ph.D. degree
 - Guidelines for writing the Ph.D. dissertation
There should be specific and clear guidelines for the writing of the proposal and the dissertation, with detailed specifications regarding the chapters it contains, the system used for the presentation of each chapter, sub-chapters and

- bibliography, the minimum word limit, the binding, the cover page and the prologue pages, including the pages supporting the authenticity, originality and importance of the dissertation, as well as the reference to the Committee for the final evaluation.
- Information on Plagiarism check
There must be a plagiarism check system and information given on the stages and check of plagiarism as well as the consequences in case of such misconduct.
 - Policy in reference to the Doctoral Advisory Committee and the Final Evaluation Committee for the support of the doctoral student's' research proposal and dissertation
 - The number, composition, procedure and criteria for the formation of the member committee must be determined whom the doctoral student submits in writing the research proposal, as well as the Final Evaluation Committee for the final oral defense of the dissertation.
 - Supervision and evaluation
The minimum qualifications and experience that the following members should have must be determined: the supervisor-chairperson of the members of the Advisory Committee, any co-supervisors, as well as the Chairperson and the members of the Final Evaluation Committee. Also, the duties of the supervisor-Chairperson and other members of the Advisory Committee towards the student must be determined i.e. regular meetings, reports per semester and feedback from supervisors, support for writing articles and participating in conferences
 - Number of doctoral students per supervisor
The number of doctoral students that each chairperson supervises must be determined
 - Dissertation Repository
The process of submitting the dissertation to the university library so that it is available to the External Evaluation Committees and to the library users must be described.

- In regard to Distance Learning Programs, particular attention should be paid to the criteria for Distance Learning Programs, especially,
 - the degree to which the program, the material, the facilities, and the guidelines safeguard the interaction between students, students and instructors, students and material.
 - the mechanisms and measures taken to ensure this interaction
 - the number of students who upload their work and discuss it in the platform during the semester?
 - the quality of the material used and the qualifications of the instructors for teaching in the concrete e-learning program
 - the program's compatibility with e-learning delivery supported by scientific arguments.
- Institutions have a second chance to correct what emerges from the EEC report, so EECs are asked to make objective comments and provide fruitful recommendations on which the Council of the Agency may safely base its accreditation decisions.
- EEC members are expected to carry out external evaluation on the basis of the abovementioned standards and indicators as well as according to their expertise and international experience.
- The External Evaluation Report must be delivered to the Agency prior to the EEC's departure from Cyprus.

The discussion of the evaluation criteria is an integral part of the briefing and comments and observations on behalf of the experts are taken into account for the improvement of the evaluation forms. During the discussion the experts are informed that they are free to make recommendations in their Report that comply with the CYQAA standards and other internationally recognized standards and guidelines which may vary depending on the scientific discipline, level, and teaching methodologies.

The site visits are coordinated and monitored by CYQAA staff whose main responsibility is to facilitate the EEC's work and provide the experts with close support and clarifications.

The Site Visit - Guidelines for Conduct of the Site Visit:

CYQAA organizes and the EEC conducts a site visit which is scheduled to enable the EEC to examine the usual operations of HEI and to decide on the degree its operations comply with the quality standards and indicators. During the site visit the EEC has various meetings with the key persons of the institution.

The site visit is an integral part of the external evaluation process. It is organized by the Agency in close collaboration with the EEC members and the given Program's Coordinator. During the visit, the latter is responsible for any administrative issues need be addressed and for the provision of any additional documents requested by the EEC.

Site visit locations:

The EEC evaluates the quality of the school's facilities and resources at the main campus, branch campuses and additional locations, as well as a representative sample of sites affiliated with the HEI, as appropriate.

Site Visit Schedule

The site visit schedule includes, as a minimum, the following meetings and activities:

- (1) *A first meeting with the Head of the Institution, the Head or members of the Internal Quality Committee, the Head of the relevant Department.*
- (2) *A meeting with the Institution's Internal Evaluation Committee and the given program's Coordinator.*
- (3) *A meeting with members of the teaching staff.*
- (4) *A meeting with the members of the Administrative staff.*
- (5) *A meeting with students and their representatives.*
- (6) *Examination of some dissertations at under- and post-graduate level, samples of written semester examinations, examination materials etc.*
- (7) *A briefing concerning the institution's material and technical infrastructure.*
- (8) *A visit to the campus, branches, and other facilities of the HEI*

A typical agenda for the site visit of a medical school is attached in the **ANNEX 2**.

Collection of information:

EEC members are free to request and collect any documents and information they deem necessary for the unhindered conduct of the external evaluation on their behalf. They are urged to request for documents and statistics, agreements and/or MOUs, biographical notes etc. In addition, the EEC collects information from the program coordinators' presentations, the interviews conducted with the academic personnel, students, graduates etc. as indicated in the sample agenda.

The purpose of the visit is to assess the accuracy of information and findings included in the HEI's **application** and to explore issues which were identified by the members of the EEC in the text of the Application and/or during the visit as needing further clarification and/or additional information.

Duration of the site visit:

A typical site visit usually has duration of one (1) working day with the exception of Medical Schools in which case, the site visit may be extended to two (2) working days.

Guidelines on Content and Structure of the Report

The External Evaluation Committee drafts a report based on the application, the evaluation criteria set by the Agency, and on the basis of the information which the EEC may request from the institution. The report is drafted on the template **External Evaluation Report** which contains numerical grading and substantiates if and how the individual criteria set by the Agency have been fulfilled and to which degree.

The report is based on information provided by the institution in its application for external evaluation in the institution's self-evaluation and on findings during the onsite visit to the institution.

- The report includes an analysis of the positive and negative points identified and offers recommendations for improvement of negative aspects and for further development of good practices.
- The report formulates the assessment in a concrete and clear way, presenting the institution's educational and research objectives as compared with modern universally accepted trends in the program's scientific area.
- Findings in the report justify the answers provided and note additional comments on each standard/ indicator.
- Final conclusions and suggestions for the program of study and/or regarding particular aspects of the program are mandatory and vague comments should be avoided and positive and negative practices should be clearly defined.
- Positive and negative aspects which are discussed in the main part of the EEC report appear in the conclusions.
- Specific recommendations are made for remedying the negative aspects.
- The report comments on the HEI's ability to deal with new challenges, threats and opportunities.

There is a numerical assessment on a Linkert Scale. For each assessment area there are quality indicators (criteria) on a scale from one (1) to ten (10), which are completed by the members of the EEC. The scale is the following:

1 or 2: Poor

3 or 4: Unsatisfactory degree

5 or 6: Satisfactory degree

7 or 8: Best practice

9 or 10: Excellent

The numerical scores above, indicate the level of compliance with the standards as follows: Non-compliant (numerical scores 1 to 4) Partially compliant (numerical scores 5 or 6) Substantially compliant (numerical scores 7 or 8) Fully compliant (numerical scores 9 or 10)

It is pointed out that, in the case of indicators (criteria) that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the program of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted and a detailed explanation should be provided on the HEI's corresponding policy regarding the specific quality indicator.

Under each assessment area, EEC's are expected to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements and/or the degree of achievement of objectives. For each assessment area, the report should include:

Findings

A short description of the situation in the higher education institution (HEI), based on elements from the self-evaluation report and on findings from the onsite visit.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, following by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Typically, a full working day in Cyprus is allocated to EEC members for the drafting of the report. The Agency provides for a conference room with all the necessary equipment for this purpose. The Chair of the EEC is the EEC's coordinator for the drafting of the report and he/she is instructed to involve all experts in the discussion.

This way, the Agency provides the members of the Evaluation Committees a core of dimensions that support the collection of information about the programs', institutions' and departments' quality, and it is always open to suggestions from the part of the experts and the institutions and to reciprocal exchange of knowledge concerning, e.g., aims and expected outcomes, the institutions' vision, teaching and learning, staff number and qualifications, infrastructure, teaching material and library, student admission and assessment criteria.

Responding to the Report

A HEI undergoing the external evaluation has the opportunity to respond to the report within three (3) months from the date the institution receives it. Then, the Council examines the EEC report and the institution's response in depth and makes a final decision.

The Agency Council may take one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of new programs of study:

1. Decision to approve and award Program/Department/Institution accreditation, if the Program/Department/Institution fulfils the accreditation criteria. The Program/Department/Institution accreditation is in effect for five years, after which the program must be re-evaluated and re-accredited.
2. Decision for the conduct of a Second Evaluation on the basis of Article 20 (2) (f) (ii) of the "Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 – 2016" [N. 136(I)/2015 and N.47(I)/2016].
3. Decision to reject and decline the award of Program/Department/Institution accreditation, in case the Program/Department/Institution fails to fulfil the accreditation criteria.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Council of the Agency, before taking its decision, may ask for some evidence/documentation of answers provided in the institution's response to the EEC report. **Moreover, the Council, according to the Law, can decide to send back to the EEC the institution's reply for a second evaluation – desk review in order to be verified the institution's compliance with standards.**

The Agency's Council informs the institution accordingly. The Agency's decision, along with the report of the External Evaluation Committee are published on the Agency's website.

Personal Data Processing:

By accepting CYQAA's invitation and signing the relevant agreement the members of the EEC acknowledge that CYQAA's mission is to safeguard quality higher education for the society, which involves informing the public about the experts involved in external evaluation. Therefore, they agree to have their name, institution, and rank published in the External Evaluation Report on the Agency's website.

Additionally, by signing the contract they provide their consent to have their name, email address, professional profile, and expertise recorded and maintained in CYQAA's registry of experts.



ANNEX 1

Form 600.3

STATUTORY DECLARATION

**CONFIRMING THE ABSENCE OF ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST
OF THE MEMBERS OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEES**

I accept the invitation of the Council of the Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education dated 2019, for my participation in the External Evaluation Committee of the program/s of study:

“.....”

of the institution of higher education and I hereby declare the following:

1. According to the Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 and 2016 (Article 17 (1) (d) (iv)), I don't or I did not have during the last three (3) years any academic, research, service, financial or personal cooperative relation with the institution under evaluation.
2. I am not associated with:
 - the institution under evaluation

- any persons involved in the program/s of study and/or chief administrative/academic personnel
- any other institution/s associated with the institution under evaluation
- any other institutions in Cyprus which operate similar programs of study
- any other state of affairs which, to my knowledge, may create conditions of conflict of interest during the assignment of the duties I have undertaken

I hereby declare that I will not accept employment to the institution under evaluation for the next 2 (two) years in the case of Masters and 4 years in the case of undergraduate program.

I hereby declare that I will hold and treat all information, regarding the program of study under evaluation, as confidential and will implement and maintain safeguards to further assure the confidentiality of the information. Such Confidential Information will not, be disclosed or used other than for the purposes of the external evaluation of the program/s of study mentioned above.

3. I don't have any personal or family relationship up to the fourth degree, by blood or by marriage or any hatred for persons involved with the institution.
4. I will operate objectively within the scope of improving the quality of Higher Education and I will abstain, in any way, from promoting the interests of the institution, body or service of which I am affiliated and/or any other organisation, body or service.
5. During the evaluation period I will abstain from any other events/ activities/ meetings of the institution or its members which does not fall within the framework of evaluation.
6. I will apply the principles of non-discrimination during the carrying out of my duties.
7. The acceptance of the invitation constitutes guarantee of my impartial judgement and application of the principles of sound administration during the exercise of my duties.

Name:

Position:

Specialty:

Institution:

Fax Number:

E-Mail address:

Signature Date

Typical Visit Schedule*

DAY 1:

Arrival in Nicosia. First Meeting of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) members at the hotel.

DAY 2:

9:00 – 13:00 (indicative time)

- A meeting with the Head of the Institution and the Head or/and members of the Internal Evaluation Committee. *[40 minutes]*
- Examination of the School's structure, including the program in the proper position, i.e. by indicating the School and the Department under which the program will operate. *[20 minutes]*
- A meeting with the Head of the relevant department and the program Coordinator. Presentation of the curriculum (allocation of courses per semester, weekly content of each course, teaching methodology, teaching material, evaluation, samples of papers, samples of written examinations, admission criteria for prospective students etc.). *[70 minutes]*
- Presentation of program's feasibility study. *[10 minutes]*
- Discussion of the program as a whole and information relevant to its response to the Criteria. *[60 minutes]*
- Presentation of the equipment used in teaching and learning (software, hardware, materials, online platforms etc.). *[40 minutes]*

13:00 – 14:00

Working Lunch of EEC **only** with the educational officer of the Agency accompanying them.

14:00 – 17:00 (indicative time)

- Presentation of the academic/teaching staff teaching each course for all the years of study. *[20 minutes]*
- Examination of the curriculum vitae of the academic/teaching staff (academic qualifications, publications, research interests, research activity etc.) and their relationship with the institution as teachers in connection with any other duties they may have in the institution or/and other programs. *[20 minutes]*
- A meeting only with members of the teaching staff. *[40 minutes]*
- A meeting only with students or/and their representatives. *[30 minutes]*
- A meeting with members of the administrative staff. *[30 minutes]*
- On site visit to the premises of the institution (library, computer labs, research facilities etc.). *[40 minutes]*

DAY 3:

Report Writing - Finalization, signing and submission of the Draft Report to the Agency.

DAY 4:

Departure of EEC members from Nicosia.

A longer stay, may be necessary if more than one programs of study are reviewed.²

² The final Schedule of the EEC Site Visit and details of the meetings with constituents of the hosting Institution of higher education, will be finalized by the Program Coordinator of the hosting institution and the Agency before the visit. Coffee breaks will be scheduled by the EEC members as appropriate.